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PROGRAM The MacNeil-Lehrer Report

STATION WETA-TV
PBS Network

DATE January 5, 1983 7:30 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT The Bulgarian Connection

ROBERT MACNEIL: In May 1981, Pope John Paul was shot in St. Peter's Square. Does the assassin's trail actually lead to Moscow and the top Soviet leaders?

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MACNEIL: The Soviet newspaper Pravda said today it was utterly absurd to suggest that the Soviet Union or Bulgaria were involved in the assassination attempt on the Pope in 1981. The Official newspaper Pravda accused the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. Government of using the story to undermine Soviet disarmament proposals.

The Italian government has charged that Bulgarian intelligence agencies were involved in the attempt on the Pope's life by the Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca. The Italians arrested a Bulgarian airlines official and have been questioning him for six weeks.

The alleged Bulgarian connection has inevitably raised the question of whether such a momentous event could have been planned without the Kremlin being involved as well. That idea has in turn caused the Italian evidence to be greeted with some skepticism, even embarrassment, in the West.

Tonight, how good is the evidence that the assassination attempt on the Pope was a Bulgarian-Soviet plot?

JIM LEHRER: Robin, Mehmet Ali Agca says he learned to kill people in Lebanon in 1977 as a student at a terrorist camp run by the Soviet-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Less than two years later, he was arrested back home